



Our Self-Build Column

Simple Design is Key to Smart Self Builds



When it comes to designing your first self-build, often the heart leads the head with notions of adding every conceivable feature possible, without evaluating whether you really need – or can afford – an underground wine cellar, cinema room or indoor spa. But once reality kicks in, there are many ways to maximise the budget to achieve the wow factor and live in a beautiful, yet practical home.

It's all down to clever design and this takes many forms.

– plan the majority of your glazing to be south facing which maximises the natural light. Adding a simple overhang can be sufficient for natural shading and keeps the hot/cold level constant throughout the year. Even a simple pergola can do the trick rather than an expensive overhang saving precious funds. Furthermore, using the sun's natural heat combined with a Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery system which is standard in a Passivhaus, saves money long term as it reduces heating bills and the need for air conditioning, keeping your home warm and well ventilated as well as eliminating moisture from the building and furniture.

Foundations – a square home does not mean it's boring; and keeping foundations simple and using lightweight material and structures above will reduce the overall build cost.

Space planning – be efficient with floor space reducing the overall footprint without compromising on your wish list. Open plan living can be very attractive with natural light flooding through the home as well as reducing the number of walls required, but huge unobstructed spaces can be costly due to additional structures required (usually steel in the ceiling) but a good architect will advise on the best use of space combined with cost effective and efficient build ideas.

We recommend self-builders to always go and look at similar sized properties, so they know what a 20 x 18 ft living room looks and feels like with furniture as you won't get this concept from plans or even 3D drawings.

Keep geometry simple – curves cost money! Smart design is about maximising the living areas but minimising and streamlining wall space, which in turn reduces build costs. Anything requiring major engineering steel increases cost, as does bringing in other professions or specialist contractors. Additionally, keep surfaces in line e.g. bathroom/kitchens etc. to line up soil stacks and minimise plumbing requirements.

Labour costs – focus on your own DIY skills; it could add up by designing around your capabilities but don't be afraid to learn through YouTube or evening classes on how to tile or wallpaper. It's not difficult and will save on labour and give you a warm, happy feeling of achievement.



Above all we recommend you don't get carried away – you won't need to spend a fortune to add the wow factor, something as simple as an upside-down layout to maximise first floor views is straightforward to integrate at the design stage, adding value without extra cost.

To read the blog on the EDP property website [Click Here](#)